

Martha Focht Wohletz: December 1988

My parents, Samuel and Althea Harmer Focht, moved to the Cotati area to become chicken ranchers before I was born in 1921. My father was born in Macon County, Missouri, in 1872, a descendant of Pennsylvania German stock who came to this country before the Revolution. As a young man and after finishing his schooling, he worked his way to Walla Walla, Washington, then down to Sacramento where he worked for the Southern Pacific Railroad in the shops as a draughtsman. Following this he moved to Sebastopol where he worked for Luther Burbank who had sizable acreage. My father bought some land from Luther Burbank, built a house on it, and his sister-in-law moved from Missouri to keep house for him. He met my mother while attending the Methodist Church in Sebastopol.

My mother, Althea Harmer, had been raised by her grandmother from the time that she was a baby, and had moved with her from Lynn County, Kansas, to Oregon, and then to Sebastopol. She had attended Sweet's Business College, and was working for the Sebastopol Times as a typesetter when she met my father. After they were married, my father again went to work for Southern Pacific, this time in San Francisco as a file clerk. He became tired of going back and forth to Sebastopol, and after the births of my sister, Mary, and brother, Paul, he bought ten acres of land in the Cotati district on Gravenstein Highway. This was in 1915. He built a little house, became a chicken farmer and was a charter member of Poultry Producers in Cotati. I was born in the old house on the ranch, and remember playing in it after our new house was built. My parents stayed on the ranch for many years, retiring to Chico in 1949 and from there to Los Molinos in 1960.

Chicken ranching at our Cotati farm of ten acres was a way of making a living to provide food, clothing and the necessities of life. One certainly didn't become rich at it, at least we didn't, but it did give the whole family plenty of work to keep each one busy. My father didn't believe in "all work and no play" but took us on day trips with picnic lunches in the summer time which we enjoyed. One trip which I remember took place almost every year was to Sacramento. We would visit the Crocker Art Gallery where the pictures of Thomas Hill made a big impression me, as they were so large, or we might go to the State Fair. We would go in our Model T on our trips, and if there were hills that were too steep, my father would have to put the car in reverse and back up them in order to get over them, and we would have to get out of the car and walk.

I don't remember how many chickens we had, or how many baby chicks we raised each year, but we had two long rows of chicken houses with fenced chicken yards, a granary, and two brooder houses. We would collect the eggs in buckets at least two times a day, often three times if the chicken yards were muddy. This would take place at 10:00 a.m., noon, and at

4:00 p.m. To clean them, two of us would sit on each side of a revolving emery belt and hold the egg against the belt which would take off the dirt. This was a contraption that my father fixed that was run by an electric motor. The very dirty eggs were washed, and the cracked eggs were used by my mother. (I remember that we had lots of angel food and sponge cakes.) The eggs were packed in the crates as they were cleaned. This was done after each gathering, and the process took from half an hour to an hour in time.

Three times a week the eggs were delivered to the Poultry Producers plant in Cotati. My sister remembers my father taking the eggs to the railway station. That was before my time. My father took the eggs on a wagon drawn by a horse. I remember riding to school in Cotati on the wagon. He would bring home empty crates for the eggs, and sacks of mash and grain for the chickens. I thought that we had gone up in the world when he discontinued using the horse and wagon, and used a model A sedan which he built into a truck to do his delivery.

When my father would clean out the litter in the hen house, a monthly process, it would take him a day of hard work, not only for him, but for my mother. He cleaned out under the roosts every Friday. He would use a wheelbarrow, and rake the droppings into it, or shovel the litter into it, and take it out to the horse and wagon, which he continued to use for that purpose.

My father mixed his own mash out of a variety of ground-up grains. When I was a very little girl, I used to like to climb up on a pile of this mixed-up mash and kick it around with my bare feet, as it felt so good. When I recall this, I wonder why my father didn't protest. Father fed the chickens this mash, milo, or grain, and shells which were kept in a box for the chickens to eat at any time. He grew kale, and we had to pick the leaves for them to eat.

Other big jobs which had to be done were culling out the non-producers and selling them, vaccinating the pullets, putting ointment on the baby chicks that were pecking each other, and all of this involved catching them and putting them into coops. I think that we three children weren't too unhappy when we escaped any of these jobs by being in school, or having easier chores to do.

One of the traumatic events which happened in our life on the ranch occurred when the new Gravenstein Highway went through our place. The highway was planned to go right where our hen houses, brooder house and granary were. All of these had to be moved before construction could begin. I remember that our baby chicks were very young when this move was to take place, which worried my father as he didn't see how they could be kept warm during the move. They survived, we survived, my father included, and he continued to raise chickens until he retired late in 1948.

The new highway divided our ranch so that we had a hillside covered with eucalyptus and some cork oak that my father had planted for the wood. This was on one side of the highway, and the chicken ranch was on the lower side. No longer could I get into my red wagon and ride down the hill toward the house, but I did have the grove of trees as a playground which I enjoyed.

It seems to me, that this chicken ranch which we called home, was a wonderful place, and when we would come home from being away from it, it was nice to know that things hadn't changed, and there were still eggs to gather and pack.

## PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

Oral History Program  
Family History Questionnaire

<u>Name</u>	<u>Birthdate</u>	<u>Birthplace</u>	<u>Deceased? Date</u>
Parents* ALTHEA HARMER FOCHT 09-04-85 LYNX KAN			04-06-1885
SAMUEL S. FOCHT 3-28-1872 MISS.	3-21-13	11(?) 1961	
Brothers & Sisters MARY LEELA FOCHT ALBERTSON, SEBASTOPOL CA	2-07-96		
ALFRED PAUL FOCHT 12-21-15	SEBASTOPOL CA		
Grand-parents* RACHEL HARMER ? ? ?			
MARY FOCHT ? ? ?			
Spouse NORBERT HAROLD WOHLFERT 11-22-16	Los MOLINOS CA	11-20-91	
Children DAVID ALAN WOHLFERT 09-26-48	CHICO CA		
DEBORAH JEAN W. BOLAS 04-23-50	" "		
KENNETH HAROLD WOHLFERT 01-19-52	" "		
ELLEN LOUISE PATERA 06-11-53	CORNING "		
Grandchildren ANTHONY ALAN WOHLFERT 01-22-79	CHICO		
CATHERINE RENEE " 03-16-81	CHICO		
ADAM HAINS " 03-16-81	CHICO		
SARAH ALLISON " 03-04-87	CHICO		
ELLEN CLAIRE BOLAS 07-31-84	ST LOUIS, MO		
JOHN DAVID BOLAS 11-01-87	ST LOUIS, MO		
LOREN KENNETH WOHLFERT 03-18-85	LOS ALAMOS NM		
SONYA GRAYSON WOHLFERT 10-16-86	" "		
ELIZABETH ELLEN PATERA 12-24-81	TEMPE AZ		
MARGARET JEAN PATERA 05-26-85	NAPERVILLE IL		
ALLISON MARIE PATERA 04-01-88	" "		
SAMUEL SMYTH PATERA 06-17-91	SANTA FE NM		

\*Please include maiden name of mother and grandmothers.

THANK YOU

470

PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM  
Oral History Program  
Narrator Personal Information Questionnaire

Name WOHLETZ MARTHA DEBORAH FOCHT  
Last First Middle (Maiden)

Address 11801 PAREY AVE  
RED BLUFF CA 96080

Marital status: Married Single Divorced Widowed X

Birthdate 04-22-21 Birthplace COTATI, CA

Length of residence in Petaluma (or Sonoma County) 23 YEARS

Education: Elementary school COTATI ELEMENTARY

Secondary school PETALUMA HIGH SCHOOL Grad 1938

College U. C. BERKELEY Grad 42

Other CHICO STATE SAN FRANCISCO STATE

Occupation(s) or former occupations(s) TEACHER, SCHOOL LIBRARIAN

Travels HAWAII, AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND, ENGLAND, ALASKA

FRANCE, GERMANY, AUSTRIA, ITALY, SWITZERLAND, CZECH REPUBLIC

Organizations, clubs FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY

Other special interests CHURCH, VOLUNTEERING AT THE LIBRARY

AQUA AEROBICS, TRAVELING, READING, LISTENING TO  
CLASSICAL AND CHORAL MUSIC

Additional comments

THANK YOU!

PETALUMA HISTORICAL MUSEUM  
Oral History Program

Unconditional Release Agreement

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In addition to the rights and authority given to you under the preceding paragraph, I hereby authorize you to edit, publish, sell and/or license the use of my oral history memoir in any other manner which the Museum considers to be desirable and I waive any claim to any payments which may be received as a consequence thereof by the Museum.

PLACE RED BLUFF, CA

DATE Dec. 16, 1997

Marcha F. Wohletz  
(Interviewee)

(for the Petaluma Historical Museum)

472

2000-20-05

1960-1961  
MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS  
Harold P. Goldstein, Director

GENERAL INFORMATION

Name: WAGNER Address: 1000 N. Dearborn St.  
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60610  
Age: 16 Sex: Male Grade: 10  
Instrument: Guitar Price: \$100.00  
Description: A solid wood guitar with a dark finish and a  
black pickguard. It has a neck made of mahogany and a  
body made of maple. It has a pickup and a volume control.  
Length: 36 inches Weight: 5 pounds Condition: Very good  
Notes: It has a case and a strap. It is in excellent condition.  
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Other: None Date Received: 10/10/60  
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THURSDAY



